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ABSTRACT

A study of youth out-migration from the Scottish Borders region was based on the 1989 Scottish Young People's Survey--a survey of students during their final compulsory school year (age 16-17)--plus followup interviews in 1995 with 23-year-olds from the rural Borders region. Among those in school in the Borders at age 16, only around one-third still lived there at age 19. By age 23, few migrants had returned. Structural reasons for migration included limited higher education facilities and few good-paying jobs in the region; migrants left mainly to continue their education or to get better jobs. Stayers tended to be from local families and to feel strong attachments to community. By age 23, migrants had more education than stayers and were better off economically, while stayers were more likely to have experienced unemployment or other job setbacks, to have married and started families, and to live with their parents. Some stayers felt trapped in the local labor market, while some migrants longed to return but were put off by the lack of job prospects. All returnees were from local families. Youth need support and information. The formal school guidance system fails to recognize the dilemmas and tension involved in the migration decision and does not provide the information needed by someone newly independent and in a strange environment. This brief suggests that public policy designed for young people should increase their scope for choice, allowing decisions based on viable alternatives. (SV)

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Young People in Rural Scotland: Getting Out and Staying On

by Gill Jones and Lynn Jamieson

No. 13, December 1997

Young people brought up in rural areas may have to leave their home communities if they want to "get on in life", but the decision whether to leave or stay can be difficult. Newly-completed research on the transition to adulthood in the Scottish Borders finds a high rate of migration in youth, and explores why some young people stay as well as why others leave. The research was based on analysis of the Scottish Young People's Survey, and follow-up interviews in young adulthood with respondents who had been at school in the Borders when they were aged 16 years. This *CES Briefing* summarises the main findings.

- **The** Scottish Borders region is losing its young people, who feel they must leave if they want to get on in life. They leave mainly to continue their education or to get better jobs.
- **Migration** "works": among those with similar academic ability, migrants are in better economic positions at age 23 than those who have stayed on in the area. By then, some stayers feel discontented and trapped, and would like to leave but they lack the training and skills to compete for jobs elsewhere.
- **Stayers** are usually from local families. Migrants tend to be from families with a history of migration and extended family networks. While some young people are too attached to the area to leave even if they could do better elsewhere, others cannot wait to get away.
- **Migrants** sometimes long to return, but the local labour market does not attract them back once they have obtained qualifications. Aspiring returners, and the few who do return, tend to be from local families with strong local networks.
- **Policies** should be offering real choice to young people rather than be designed simply to retain them in rural communities.
- **Support** and information are needed for the migrate-or-stay decision. Parents are not all equipped to provide relevant information, and the formal guidance system fails to recognise the dilemmas and tensions involved.

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Youth out-migration

The Scottish Borders is losing its young people. Although it has a net inflow of population (mainly commuters and the elderly), it has the highest rate of loss of young people in Scotland, after the Highland and Islands areas. As elsewhere, migration away is mainly for education or employment reasons. Most young migrants from the Borders are therefore economic migrants, leaving in order to improve their career prospects.

Analysis of the Scottish Young People's Survey (SYPS) showed that of those at school in the Borders at age 16, around one-third were still living there at 19, while one-third had moved to Lothian, and the remaining third had dispersed mainly to Strathclyde, Fife and Tayside, or further afield. By 23 years, only a few had returned.

Why leave?

There are structural reasons for moving away from the Borders. Though some facilities for Higher Education exist in the area, most prospective students leave for other British universities, particularly Edinburgh. The local labour market, in some towns still dominated by the traditional woollen industry, offers little for the better-qualified school leaver or the new graduate. The region has the highest proportion of low-paid workers in Scotland, 41% earning under £220 per week, according to the New Earnings Survey, 1996. Edinburgh has the attraction not only of relative proximity, but also of more non-manual jobs, with better incomes, training and career prospects. Commuting is out of the question for most young people, and the lack of good public transport makes migration the only viable option. The contrast is stark, according to 23-year-olds interviewed:

> *"I think 9 out of 10 people that left school at the same time as me went into a factory, into the mill. It was sort of the only thing you could do."* (Ewan, stayer)

> *"I knew that if I wanted to do anything with my life I would have to go further afield. Unless you're going to go for the bottom end of the market and have no qualifications, then you're going to have to go and get a job somewhere else."* (Linda, migrant)

There is dissatisfaction among some who stay on. The SYPS shows 19-year-olds living in the Borders to be the most likely of any in Scotland to rate local job opportunities as *"worse than average"*, and the most likely to have moved town to find work. These views appear to be born of experience. By the age of 19, those still living in the Borders were the most likely of any Region to have experienced unemployment (42%). Some of those interviewed at 23 years criticised local policies designed to protect local traditional industry and prevent new industries from entering the area.

With structural reasons for migrating away apparently so powerful, it is important to consider why some people stay.

Family footsteps

Migrants often had a family history of migration, while stayers were mainly from local families (Table 1).

Table 1: Migration by age 23, by family characteristics

Parents	Middle-class		Working-class	
Respondent	Incomer	Local	Incomer	Local
Migrants	8	7	2	4
Returners		3		2
Stayers	1	6	3	9

Follow-up interviews at 23 years showed that some migrants moved to towns where they already had family: either because an older brother or sister had moved there before them, paving the way, or because grandparents lived there (and from where parents perhaps originated). Some young migrants are, however, "path-finders" rather than "path-followers". While some migrants can draw on kin support, including accommodation, when they leave their home communities, others (mainly the children of local parents) leave their support networks behind. Compare these accounts of migration experience:

> *"You had grown up with people and you knew everyone from the age of five up, and you knew all their families, so you knew people all round town, whereas actually discovering you're in a place where you don't know anyone, it's very different."* (Linda, "path-finder" from local family)

> *"It's always nice when you go somewhere not to be thrown in at the deep end and not knowing anybody. I didn't really spend that much time with (his brother). It was just nice to know that he was there if I needed anybody."* (Tim, "path-follower" from incomer family)

Outcomes for stayers and migrants

By the age of 23, some migrants were still in education or about to enter employment, while stayers had considerably more labour market experience. Stayers were also further ahead in terms of family formation and several had children. Though migrants were also forming partnerships by this stage, some stayers had already coped with divorce, separation and in one case, the death of a partner.

Unless stayers were cohabiting or had children, and could thus either share their housing costs or qualify for social housing in the public sector, they were likely still to be living with their parents. The local housing market, as elsewhere, offers little affordable housing for single young people, and therefore may "encourage" earlier marriage or cohabitation.

Migration "works"

Migration "works" for economic migrants. Among those who did well at school and had started work, migrants tend to be in better (more secure, better paid, with training and career structure) jobs than stayers. The local labour market is apparently not catering for academic achievers.

It therefore also fails to attract back qualified migrants wanting career jobs, though there are migrants who would have liked to return. Some migrants have indeed returned, but these are all from local families (Table 1).

Apart from low status jobs, stayers are more likely to have experienced unemployment and other setbacks in the labour market, less likely to have had training, and more likely to have changed jobs. Some stayers with training for a particular occupation could not continue that career path. For some there was a fit between labour supply and demand, and some were happy to take any job available.

Stayers can become "trapped" in the local labour market because they have no transferable skills and are not able to compete in labour markets elsewhere. This is particularly the case among mill workers, where training may be limited to the needs of a specific operational task. Disaffected stayers are thus unable to leave the area even if they would like to. There are also psychological barriers:

> *"There's a certain psyche in Borders people - well genuine Borders people - from moving out and doing something else. And I think you can get trapped in that general psyche."* (Stewart, migrant)

A sense of belonging?

The findings offer only qualified support for the stereotype that achievers leave and the rest stay. Cross-cutting the structural push-and-pull effects of local disadvantage and the attractiveness of distant horizons, are other more subjective factors. The degree of individual and family attachment to the local community also affects migration, and here the common stereotypes of locals and outsiders are perpetuated in respondents' accounts. Those who felt they were treated as incomers when children may feel little attachment to a community which excluded them, while some children of established local families find it hard to leave, even to enhance their career prospects.

A sense of belonging to, or detachment from, the local community forms part of a developing individual identity during youth. This affects migration or staying on behaviour: some young people are reluctant to leave the area they feel identified with, and others, whose identities are less associated with a particular place, more able to make the break.

Preparing for migration

Social class also affects migration (see Table 1), and it is the children of middle-class families who are more likely to migrate away. Middle-class children cannot find jobs comparable to those of their parents in the area and their parents help them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for migration. This is where the children of middle-class and especially incomer parents benefit over those from working-class and local families. It is difficult for parents with no relevant experience to advise young people who are socially and geographically mobile. Many migrants are upwardly mobile, and have to rely on formal guidance for help.

Formal guidance, while available in all schools, does not appear to recognise either the dilemmas and tensions involved in the migrate-or-stay decision, or the kind of information someone newly independent and in a strange environment would need. Accounts indicated that the guidance system tended to fit people to the needs of the system rather than recognise varying individual need. Young people said they were divided into stayers who would get local jobs, and migrants who were offered college prospectuses.

> *"The careers advice is geared either from the school's point of view, just getting people to go away to university, or from the local job centre point of view, of getting people jobs in the local area and keeping them there, rather than helping them or giving them advice into looking further afield."* (Tim, migrant from incomer family)

Academic achievers not seen as "problems" tended not to receive guidance on migration, though they were the prospective migrants:

> *"We had one social (class) once a week, to prepare you for going to college and things like that. I think really what they would have been better doing, instead of some of the silly exercises they made you do, was prepare people for budgeting and living on their own and finding accommodation."* (Mary, migrant from local family)

Young people were thus sometimes unable to gain help either formally or informally and were left to their own devices.

Implications for policy

It seems clear that some young migrants and stayers are particularly disadvantaged. Policies designed *for young people* would not focus on retaining them in rural communities but would increase their scope for choice, and allow migrate-or-stay decisions to be based on viable alternatives. This would allow both disaffected stayers to leave and reluctant migrants to return. Policies designed to preserve local communities, through the protection of traditional industry and festivals, may simply increase dissatisfaction among the young.

If young people are to have real choice about staying or leaving the Scottish Borders, there should be better access to jobs offering training and career prospects. This might involve encouraging new local industries and/or improving public transport. It might also involve the provision of housing for single young people in the area.

In the meantime, guidance providers could take greater account of the difficulties many young people face when making the decision whether to migrate or stay.

Publications

Brannen,K. (1996). "Where are they now? Tracing of a highly-mobile sample", in *Survey and Statistical Computing*. London, Assoc. of Survey Computing.

Jamieson,L. (1997) "Loss of youth? Leaving and staying in The Scottish Borders".

Jones,G. (1997) "Social reproduction and geographical mobility: a study of young people in Scotland", paper presented to the European Sociological Association Conference *20th Century Europe: Inclusions and Exclusions*, University of Essex.

Jones,G. (1997) "The same people in the same places? Constructing socio-spatial identities in youth".

Further reports, on employment and training, housing and transport, guidance, migration and leaving home, will be available soon from CES or the authors.

Further information

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About this study

The research was based on the *Scottish Young People's Survey*, a 10% postal survey of a cohort of young people sampled during their 4th (final compulsory) year in secondary school in Scotland. It was funded by the Scottish Office and the Employment Department, and conducted by the CES. Longitudinal survey data on young people at average age 16¾ in 1989 and age 19¼ in 1991 was extended with data from follow-up interviews in 1995 with a subset of 23-year-olds who had been in secondary school in the Borders Region, and also interviews with their parents in 1996. Analysis of the 1991 Census provided background information. The project, completed in September 1997, was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (R000235394). Thanks to all those involved, and especially our respondents who have been so generous with their thoughts and their time. The views expressed here are the authors' alone.

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